Empires and International Structure

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Discussions of “American Empire” and the “Pax Americana” can be found in nearly every corner of the political spectrum. Arguments about the putative American imperium appear regularly on opinion-editorial pages of major papers across the globe and in foreign-policy journals. International-relations scholars have not had a lot to say about this debate, and very little has been published on it in scholarly international-relations journals. This is unfortunate, because the current debate suffers from two major flaws.

First, most scholars, pundits, and analysts who address the issue offer little more than warmed-over variants of logics found in structural realism, hegemonic-stability theory, and other mainline realist accounts of the dynamics of systems with a single, preeminent power. The term “empire” is superfluous to rather conventional claims about the desirability of unilateralism or multilateralism, the risks of overextension, and what policies are likely to trigger balancing behavior.

Second, analysts tend to focus on lessons drawn from the foreign policy of historical empires. These have some relevance to the grand strategy of a putative American. Yet if there is an American imperium, it is, by and large, an informal one. American “imperial relations” are not with colonies or incorporated territories, but with other sovereign states. Thus,

the locus of analysis should not be the interstate interactions of empires, but their "domestic" relations with constituent peripheries.[1]

These flaws have major implications for mainline international-relations scholarship on systems with preeminent powers. Work on the specific properties of imperial systems has lagged far behind analysis of unipolar and hegemonic orders. We lack theories of the dynamics of empires that adequately distinguishes them from those associated with unipolarity and hegemony. At the same time, mainstream analysis of great-power grand strategy tends to conceptualize international structure in general, and anarchy in particular, as standing outside of the kinds of entities that populate it and the ways in which they relate to one another. This leads us to treat the question of American empire as one of unit type, when what is really at stake is whether the structure of the current international system has characteristics associated with imperial orders.

[1] For examples, see Alterman 2003; Bellah 2002; Bender 2003; Ignatieff 2003; Kagan 1998; Zakaria 1999. For a good overview, see Cox 2004. There are prominent exceptions, in whole or in part, to the tendencies we identify, such as Barnett and Duvall 2005; Kaplan 2003; Mann 2003; Rosen 2003.

To address these problems, we argue that international structure should be conceptualized in network and relational terms: as regularities in patterns of transaction between various actors and social sites. Ideal-typical empires can be represented as a particular *kind* of network generated by two specific elements: heterogeneous contracting and rule through local intermediaries. In empires, cross-cutting ties between peripheries are sparse, local intermediaries operate as brokers between local interests and central authorities, and the imperial core occupies a high degree of centrality with respect to the rest of the network.

Through a combination of inductive and deductive reasoning, we generate a number of key structural dynamics of such a network. It both facilitates and places a premium on divide-and-rule strategies, but it also produces strong cross pressures on core imperial authorities as they attempt to navigate the competing demands of different peripheries. Indirect rule, for its part, minimizes governance costs and allows core imperial authorities to blame intermediaries for unpopular policies. On the other hand, it creates endemic principal-agent problems that, at the extreme, can lead intermediaries to rebel against imperial rule.

There are two main advantages to casting the structure of empires in network terms. First, doing so allows us to compare

the structural properties of empires directly to those associated with ideal-typical unipolar and hegemonic systems. Second, a network approach to international structure highlights how variation in patterns of transaction in the international politics can lead to distinctive embedded structural logics within the same international system.

We begin with an overview of approaches to systems with preeminent powers. After a quick discussion of mainstream accounts – unipolarity and hegemony – we lay out our argument about the dynamics of empires. In the next section, we introduce principles from network analysis that inform our deductive account of imperial processes and provide a basis for endogenizing structural variation between international systems characterized by single-power primacy. We then recast unipolar, hegemonic, and imperial orders in terms of their network structures before moving onto a detailed discussion of how structural tendencies and strategies of control interact in imperial systems to shape their persistence and decline. Here we use a number of illustrations designed to show how similar processes can be observed, and configure differently, across disparate imperial systems.[2] We subsequently suggest how various

[2] This article is not intended to provide a rigorous test of hypothesis derived from imperial structures, but to establish

configurations of the network properties of international politics are likely to trigger different dynamics associated with unipolar, hegemonic, and imperial orders. In the conclusion, we reflect on some implications for the question of "American Empire."

Three Approaches to Systems with Preeminent Powers

Mainstream approaches to systems with single, predominant powers fall into one of two frameworks.[3] The first, *unipolarity*, assumes that states are unitary actors operating within an anarchical environment. Some argue that unipolar systems are inherently unstable: the concentration of power in the hands of a single political community will invariably trigger counterbalancing behavior. Others believe that unipolar systems

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the plausibility of recurrent mechanisms and processes associated with an ideal type. On the advantages and drawbacks of this kind of approach, see McAdam, Tarrow et al. 2001; Mommsen 1989, 125-126; Ringer 1997, 5-6, 17, 110-116; Tilly 1997.

[3] Ikenberry 2002, 8-10. In practice, scholars often draw upon elements of both frameworks.

are stable precisely because they are unbalanced: no state or coalition of states will be able to challenge the preeminent power, and hence few are likely to be even attempt to engage in balancing behavior.[4]

The second, *hegemonic-order theory*, covers a broader array of approaches, including hegemonic-stability theory,[5] power-transition theory,[6] and constitutional-order theory (a distinctive subtype of hegemonic order).[7] The fate of hegemonic systems depends largely on the interaction of three factors: the ability of the hegemon to sustain its economic, military, and technological leadership, the degree to which potential challengers perceive themselves as benefiting from the existing hegemonic order, and the propensity for hegemonic overextension.[8] Hegemonic-order theorists tend to treat states as unitary

[4] Brooks and Wohlforth 2002; Layne 1993; Layne 1997; Waltz 2000; Wohlforth 1999.

[5] E.g.,Gilpin 1981; Kindleberger 1973.

[6] E.g., Organski 1958.

[7] E.g., Ikenberry 2001.

[8] E.g., Gilpin 1981, 26-27; Ikenberry 2001.

actors, although their vision of hegemonic systems involves elements of both anarchy and hierarchy.[9]

Empires

The aforementioned accounts generally conceptualize empires as a subtype of either unipolarity or hegemony.[10] A more robust approach recognizes that empires involve distinctive structures and dynamics from either unipolar or hegemonic systems. Most scholars agree that empires are multiethnic entities, that they involve the dominance of one polity over other political communities, and that core-periphery relations are an important component of imperial systems.[11] These features are captured by

[9] Power-transition theorists argue that "relations within… [the] power hierarchy are not anarchical despite the absence of formal rules and enforced laws" Lemke 2002, 22. Ikenberry 2001. describes both imperial and constitutional systems as "hierarchical."

[10] Gilpin 1981, 30. Ikenberry 2001, 27. This echoes the tendency we have identified in the literature on American empire.

[11] See, for example, Cohen 2004; Doyle 1986; Lake 2001, 133; Mann 2003; Motyl 1999; Motyl 2001; Rosen 2003, 51; Spruyt 2005, 3-4; Tilly 1997; Watson 1992, 16.

an ideal type that combines two factors: heterogeneous contracting and indirect rule.[12] As Charles Tilly argues, cores rule their peripheries through the "retention or establishment of particular, distinct compacts" and exercise power "through intermediaries who enjoy considerable autonomy within their own domains" in exchange for "compliance, tribute, and military collaboration with the center."[13] We should examine each of these characteristics in turn.

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[12] We surveyed a number of different historical accounts of empires, including the British, Habsburg, Mongol, Muscovite, and Roman. We also reviewed what a wide variety of scholars in history, sociology, political science, and international affairs have to say about the nature of empires. In this respect, our account is synthetic. We found widespread agreement on many of the fundamental features of empires. Thus, we reduce those common features to a few essential characteristics and recast those characteristics in terms of an ideal-typical network structure. Based on a combination of deductive and inductive reasoning, we associate the dynamics outlined above with that network structure. On these features more generally, see Howe 2002, 15, 15. For historical examples, see Allsen 1987; Fieldhouse 1966; Koenigsberger 1969; Lenman 2001; Morgan 1990.

[13]Tilly 1997, 3, 3.

Indirect Rule

In British imperial historiography, systems of "indirect rule" are those in which intermediaries are recruited from peripheral populations, such as local chieftains or princes. "Direct rule," in contrast, means administration by officials recruited from the imperial core.[14] In our usage, both systems are variations in indirect rule, i.e., rule through autonomous and quasi-autonomous intermediaries.[15]

The scope of indirect rule varies across empires. In some, local intermediaries are granted very little discretion over a wide range of policy formulation and implementation. In others, local intermediaries merely have to guarantee a regular flow of resources, access to markets, or minimal compliance with general imperial rules. During much of the eighteenth century, for example, the North American colonies of the British empire were essentially self-governing.[16] Under the Golden Horde (a typical tribute-taking empire), the princes of the former Rus' could do pretty much what they pleased as long as they supplied regular tribute (however burdensome) to their imperial rulers, did not

[14] Mamdani 1996.

[15] Tilly 1997, 3.

[16] Lenman 2001.

unduly interfere with the trade routes that provided a crucial source of revenue to the horde, and so forth.[17] During the northeast expansion of Muscovy, central authorities would often issue orders of astounding specificity concerning the movements of populations, livestock, and resources. Muscovite agents often replaced local elites.[18] In Korea, Japanese "governors-general… functioned as imperial pro-consuls, rather than as mere agents of civil government." In Taiwan, they were "semi-autonomous and highly authoritarian." Elsewhere, they had far more limited autonomy.[19]

Informal empires are likely to involve very high levels of intermediary autonomy. Just as with many examples of tribute-taking empires, intermediaries in informal empires are local elites who have their own independent power-base among members of the local population: local intermediaries may by rulers or elected officials in their own right. Nevertheless, as in formal empires, the degree of autonomy may vary not only across cases but between peripheries within a single empire.

[17] Halperin 1983, 242 and 250; Martin 1995.

[18] Keenan 1986, 131.

[19] Peattie 1984, 25-26.

Heterogeneous Contracting

Empires, like all political systems, are based on bargains that specify rights and obligations. Imperial bargains may involve an exchange of basing rights in the periphery for access to markets in the core, or they may specify the adoption of specific forms of government or legal orders in a periphery. The benefits derived from peripheries may be diffuse, or they may be oriented towards a specific elite (colonial or indigenous), ethnic group, or sub-region. Such contracts are always *asymmetric*, backed by the threat of imperial force and negotiated based on the superior resources of imperial cores, but they are contracts nonetheless. To reduce empires to coercive arrangements is to miss the degree to which the benefits of these contracts, and their ultimate legitimacy, underpins imperial orders.[20]

Nearly all political communities involve asymmetric bargains. Federations, for their part, also involve indirect rule. What distinguishes ideal-typical imperial contracting from

[20] Cox 2004, 601; Daniels and Kennedy 2002; Lake 1996; Lake 1999; Lake 2001; Lendon 1997; Lustick 1993, 447; Pagden 2001; Tilly 1997.

these other examples is that it is heterogeneous: cores develop distinctive bargains with each periphery under their control.[21]

Consequences

The combination of indirect rule and heterogeneous contracting gives ideal-typical empires a specific kind of structure, one characterized by low levels of interaction between peripheries, and authority relations that run through the core. Alexander Motyl calls this structure a "rimless hub-and-spoke system." The "most striking aspect of such a structure is not the hub and spoke, but the absence of a rim… among the peripheral units or between and among them and non-imperial polities…."[22]

These characteristics shape the dynamics of empires. Heterogeneous contracting produces tradeoffs. The more heterogeneous imperial bargains, the easier it is, *ceteris paribus*, for central authorities to effectively divide-and-rule imperial segments. But highly differentiated imperial bargains also increase "cross pressures" on central authorities as they are pushed and pulled in different directions by multiple

[21] On this distinction between ideal-typical empires and federations, see Tilly 1997, 3.

[22] Lendon 1997; Motyl 2001, 16-20, 16-20.

constituencies. One common way that imperial rulers minimize these problems is through "multivocal signaling": they attempt to legitimize their rule in ways that are coded differently in different segments.[23]

Similarly, the more empires limit the autonomy of local intermediaries, the more they lose the ability to distance themselves from unpopular policies while increasing governance costs. Expanding the autonomy of local intermediaries, however, makes imperial rule less efficient – although it may actually prove to be ultimately more effective – while increasing principal-agent problems between central authorities and local intermediaries; at the extreme, it can facilitate "patrimonial secessions" in which the local intermediary attempts to break away from imperial control. Such tradeoffs influence, and are influenced by, the strategies imperial authorities pursue to prevent the formation of countervailing coalitions within specific peripheries

Indeed, imperial structures depend more on divide-and-rule strategies than on standard balance-of-power processes; their persistence also depends, to a great degree, on maintaining

[23] On "multivocal" or "polyvalent" signaling, see Bakhtin 1990; Padgett and Ansell 1993; Tilly 2002.

legitimate rule.[24] Many of the problems associated with the "interstate" relations of empires, such as strategic overextension, are just as likely to have their origins in internal failures of imperial management as in international processes.

International Structure: A Network Approach

Our argument about the dynamics of empires is partly inductive, but also derives from an analysis of the network properties of empires. Network approaches treat structures as "regularities in the patterns of relations between concrete entities…." Every social and political environment is characterized by a particular network structure, one generated by the pattern of direct and indirect interactions between actors.[25] As with other relational approaches in international-relations theory, network analysis treats international structures as *emerging* from the specific interaction of agents. Thus, anarchy represents a particular kind of relational

[24] On the centrality of divide-and-rule strategies for empires, see Mann 2003.

[25] White, Boorman et al. 1976, 733-734.

structure, in which states do not assert authority over the activities of other states.[26]

In contrast, international-relations theorists often treat international structure as *sui generis*. Many variants of realist theory, for example, conceptualize anarchy as an ordering principle that stands apart from the relations of states in the international system.[27] Even though agent-structure co-constitution is a fundamental principle of constructivist meta-theory,[28] some constructivists understand international structure in terms of catalogs of norms, identities, and values that stand, at least analytically, above and outside of the interactions of agents.[29] This makes it difficult to analyze structural variation of the kind implied by the existence of informal imperial relations; it also obscures how specific structural variation in international politics can lead to different combinations of processes and mechanisms.

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[26] Dessler 1989; Lake 1996; Lake 1999; Lake 2003; Milner 1993; Weber 1997.

[27] Waltz 1979. For a similar point, see Lake 2001; Lake 2003.

[28] Onuf 1989; Ruggie 1998; Wendt 1999.

[29] Author

Network Analysis

Network analysis, whether in qualitative or quantitative variants, is only just beginning to make inroads into international-relations scholarship.[30] Even in more settled applications of network analysis there are a variety of different approaches, terms, and measurement standards. In this article, we borrow a number of key concepts and adapt them for our own purpose.

Ties are formed between at least two actors through processes of social interaction. They involve any kind of exchange relationship, whether reciprocal, unilateral, coercive, affective, violent or peaceful. For example, gift exchange, physical coercion, economic transactions, romantic interactions, and military conflict are different forms of social interactions that produce ties.[31] *Strong ties* are of long duration, affective

[30] Goddard forthcoming; Heffner-Burton and Montgomery 2006 (forthcoming).

[31] Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994, 1419. See also Granovetter 1973; Granovetter 1983; Tilly 1978; Wasserman and Faust 1994; Wellman and Berkowitz 1998; White and Boorman 1976. Ties do not have to be between actors, per se. Many network theorists focus on "nodes," which may be actors, geographical locations, routers, or any number of other entities. See Wellman 1983, 157.

intensity, and high reciprocity. *Weak ties*, in contrast, lack these characteristics.[32] In much of our discussion, we will be particularly concerned with ties of authority: interactions in which actors make legitimate claims on the behavior of others.

The arrangement of ties produces a *network*. Any social structure, whether decentralized or centralized, heterogeneous or homogenous, can be represented in terms of a network of ties. It follows that, in relational and network approaches to social structure, structures emerge from patterns of transaction.[33] This view is broadly consistent with the constructivist emphasis on agent-structure co-constitution.[34] Treating structures as networks is also, however, consonant with structural realism's

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[32] Granovetter 1973, 1361. One way of conceptualizing this variable is the "multiplexity" of ties: "a concrete tie can better be visualized as multiplex, e.g., a vector quantity of different amounts of several components" White 1972, 9.

[33] Arquilla, Ronfeldt et al. 1999; Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994, 1481; Mardsen 1990, 435-436; Tilly 1998, 399; Wellman 1983, 156-162. distinguish "networks" from "hierarchies." While this may be heuristically useful for their purposes, hierarchies are also networks, although ones characterized by various relations of super- and subordination. See Chase 1980.

[34] Dessler 1989; Wight 1999.

insistence that structures be cast in transposable terms.[35] A basic assumption of network and relational sociology is that isomorphisms in the formal properties of networks generate similar causal logics and dynamics. This should be the case regardless of the particular historical period in which a network structure is found, what level of analysis it operates at, or the specific cultural content of the ties that make up a network.[36]

One important structural feature of networks is how *dense* or *sparse* they are. A standard definition of network density is the "ratio of existing ties to possible ties."[37] A network is maximally dense when every actor is directly linked to every other actor. In sparse networks, most actors are linked indirectly to one another through a small number of other actors in the network. Sparse networks contain a great many "structural holes" (network gaps).[38] Actors within various networks exhibit various degrees of *centrality*, in other words, the degree to which they connected to other actors in the network.[39]

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[35] Waltz 1986, 329.

[36] Simmel 1971, 25-26.

[37] Gould 1993, 190.

[38] Burt 1992.

[39] Wellman and Berkowitz 1998.

Some network theorists and relational sociologists also refer to *categories*, which is generally another term for identities or social roles. Combining categories and networks yields a *catnet*: "a set of individuals comprising both a category and a network." Dynamics of collective mobilization alter depending on the particular configuration of "catness" and "netness." Highly organized collective action occurs when categorical homogeneity and network density come together in a particular movement, such as a "printers union local."[40] Prisoner's Dilemma dynamics are most prevalent in low-cat, low-net environments: heterogeneous identities work against trust, while sparse networks prevent effective monitoring of cooperation and defection. In high-cat, high-net environments, however, collective identification and dense networks of reciprocity greatly reduce the standard collective-action problem associated with the Prisoner's Dilemma.[41] The logic here

[40] Tilly 2003, 63-64.

[41] Bearman 1993. Both high-cat, low-net and low-cat, high-net conditions lead to their own collective-mobilization dynamics and problems. In the former, the lack of ties makes identity-based collective action difficult to coordinate and sustain. In the latter, the lack of common identities and interests creates tends to interfere with collective mobilization. In either case,

combines rationalist and constructivist "solutions" to the Prisoner's Dilemma. Rationalists stress repeated interaction and patterns of reciprocity (netness)[42] while constructivist focus on mechanisms of collective identification in overcoming distrust and fears of defection (catness).[43]

Recasting Images of Primacy as Ideal-Typical Network Structures

Each of the frameworks discussed above – unipolarity, hegemony, and empire – imply different network structures. In doing so, we can better appreciate the differences and similarities between them; we also gain greater analytic leverage over how their structural properties give rise to the dynamics associated with them. Accounts of unipolarity and hegemonic orders are a staple of international-relations scholarship; thus, we focus our attention far more on the network structure of ideal-typical empires and how that

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collective action is not so much a "problem" but takes different forms.

[42] E.g., Axelrod and Keohane 1993.

[43] E.g,, Wendt 1994; Wendt 1996.

structure shapes political processes of brokerage and collective mobilization.

Unipolarity

Scholars interested in the dynamics of unipolar systems derive most of their assumptions from structural-realist theory; states are unitary, thinly rational actors operating in an anarchical environment. Because pressures for self-help promote similar organizational structures at the unit-level, states are "functionally undifferentiated." Hence, international systems differ mainly with respect to the distribution of power, which can be unipolar, bipolar, or multipolar.[44]

As Keohane and Nye argue, the realist ideal-typical understanding of international politics assumes that states act as coherent units, and that multiple channels do *not* "connect societies," whether in the form of "interstate," "transgovernmental," or "transnational" ties.[45] In other words, the relations between states is one of "billiard balls colliding" against one another.[46] In network terms, ties between

[44] Waltz 1979, 104-105. Wohlforth 1999. Layne 1993.

[45] Keohane and Nye 1989, 24-25.

[46] Zacher 1992, 60. See also Milner 1993.

states are sparse, ties between actors within states are comparative dense (see Figure 1).

Thus, the structural-realist states-under-anarchy framework can be recast as a nested network structure.[47] Tie between states are comparatively very sparse, and consist of no significant relations of authority.[48] State identities are assumed, at least implicitly, to be heterogenous with respect to one another: each state claims to represent a different national or ethnic group.[49]

<< Figure 1 About Here >>

In contrast, states themselves are treated as having a high-cat, high-net structure. According to Waltz, "the division of labor across nations… is slight in comparison with the highly articulated division of labor within them. Integration draws the parts of a nation closer together."[50] Structural realists assume that domestic societies are characterized by dense interconnections of social, political, and economic ties. At the same time, the ideal-typical representation of states in

[47] Ferguson and Mansbach 1996.

[48] Waltz 2000, 88.

[49] Lapid and Kratochwil 1996. Wendt 1996.

[50] Waltz 2000, 105.

structural-realist theory is one of singular, coherent units, i.e., of entities in which a dominant categorical identity maps more-or-less onto the dense network of ties contained within domestic society.[51]

Hegemonic Orders

The network structures associated with hegemonic-order theory are different from those implicit in descriptions of unipolarity. Many power-transition theorists, and some hegemonic-order theorists, describe such international systems as hierarchical rather than anarchical.[52] Given a choice between "anarchy" and "hierarchy" as *sui generis* categories, that seems reasonable. After all, hegemonic orders cannot be described as simply "decentralized and anarchic."[53] Recasting unipolar systems in network-structural terms shows that the ideal-typical hegemonic order is a particular configuration of anarchy and hierarchy, one distinctive from that associated with unipolar orders.

[51] Lapid and Kratochwil 1996.

[52] Ikenberry 2001, 26; Lemke and Werner 1996, 22; Organski 1958.

[53] Waltz 1979, 88.

First, the network structure of hegemonic systems involves the existence of at least some *weak and sparse ties of authority* between the hegemon and lesser powers. Such authority ties are both weak and sparse because they are (a) informal and (b) maintained through the selective use of punishments and incentives by the hegemonic power. Moreover, hegemonic-order theorists generally conceptualize these ties as operating between states themselves; in other words, their primary form is inter-state rather than inter-societal.[54]

Hegemonic-order theorists, like structural realists, focus on the interests and policies of coherent states. [55] For power-transition theorists the key question is whether rising powers are "revisionist" or "status-quo" states.[56] This position makes sense *if* the structure of inter-state relations is broadly similar to the low-cat, low-net configuration also found in structural-realist theory. States cannot decide whether or not to challenge the hegemonic power through inter-state force *unless* they enjoy significant internal coherence and autonomy in world politics.

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[54] Gilpin 1981, 145; Ikenberry 2002, 9-10; Lemke and Werner 1996, 22-23, 50-53. Ikenberry 2001, 27.

[55] Ikenberry 2001.

[56] Gilpin 1981; Lemke 2002, 22; Organski 1958.

Second, ideal-typical hegemonic orders also differ from ideal-typical unipolarity in that they involve higher levels of interdependence. Hegemonic orders, particularly if they involve open-trade regimes, encourage the formation of *cross-cutting ties between states* within the hegemonic system. After all, the ability of states to reap gains from limited economic specialization, or from the creation of a network of security guarantees, isan important component in most accounts of the factors that stabilize hegemonic orders.[57]

<< Figure 2 About Here >>

These two differences give rise to an ideal-typical network structure of the kind illustrated in Figure 2. Authority ties are represented by dotted arrows to capture their weak and sparse quality, while cross-cutting ties are represented as a few lines to capture their comparative sparseness.[58]

A distinctive version of hegemonic orders is G. John Ikenberry's notion of a "constitutional order." Constitutional

[57] Ikenberry 2001; Ikenberry 2002, 10.

[58] Technically, these cross-cutting ties should link all states together. We have avoided representing such ties to keep the diagram legible.

orders "are political orders organized around agreed-upon legal and political institutions that operate to allocate rights and limit the exercise of power."[59] When hegemons establish constitutional orders, they create a system in which decision-making is highly institutionalized. Through institutional channels, lesser powers can, therefore, exert influence over the decisions of the hegemonic power. At the same time, these institutions diminish the political autonomy of the hegemon, thus allowing it to credibly commit to policies of strategic restraint.[60]

<< Figure 3 about here >>

These factors lead to an ideal-typical network structure that deviates from standard hegemonic orders (see Figure 3). First, institutions operate as social sites for reciprocal ties of authority between the hegemon and lesser powers. We represent these ties as bidirectional vectors of authority. Second, these ties connect all relevant actors within the hegemonic order. In other words, they are denser than those seen in traditional hegemonic orders and contain far fewer structural holes. Third,

[59] Ikenberry 2001, 29.

[60] Ikenberry 2001, 29-49.

they are formal ties, representing organizational patterns of authority. The ideal-typical structure of constitutional orders mirrors John G. Ruggie's description of multilateralism, in which states within the order have voice opportunities and influence with respect to one another's decisions.[61]

Our ideal-typical hegemonic order does not involve international institutions, while our ideal-typical constitutional order does. Actual hegemonic orders, at least from 1815 onwards, combine elements of both ideal types.[62] Nevertheless, an institutionalized hegemonic order that looked closer to ideal-typical hegemonic orders than ideal-typical constitutional orders would involve authority operating *from* the hegemonic power *over* lesser powers *through* institutional sites.

Empires

The combination of heterogeneous contracting and indirect rule gives ideal-typical empires a particular network structure (see Figure 4). It involves three types of actors: core imperial authorities (IA) local intermediaries (L1-L4), and local actors (A-I). To simplify matters, we have included only two local actors per periphery. One should also assume a greater number of

[61] Ruggie 1996, 18-27.

[62] Reus-Smit 1997.

peripheries than the four represented here. This network represents *only routine authority relations*. Imperial authorities may, for example, bypass local intermediaries and negotiate directly with local actors, but doing so involves a significant break from the normal processes of imperial rule. Other kinds of ties may also exist in the network (e.g., economic, social, and kinship), but we will exclude consideration of such non-institutional ties for the present.

There are two important "levels" at which we can view the network-structure of empires: the aggregate structure of the entire network, and the local structure of core-periphery relations (e.g., IA, L1, A, and B).

<< Figure 4 about here >>

Aggregate Structure

At the aggregate level, IA is connected to L1, L2, L3 and L4, and indirectly connected to A-I. In contrast, no actors within a periphery are directly connected to any actors in a different periphery. For example, L1 is not connected to L2, L3, and L4; L2, C, and D are connected to one another, but are not connected to L2-L4, or to A, B, E, F… I. Thus, ties *between* peripheries are comparatively weak and sparse, ties *within*

peripheries are comparatively strong and dense. This aggregate structure gives rise to a number of significant, though interdependent, network characteristics.

The first involves centrality and brokerage. Both in terms of the hierarchy of authority within empires, and in terms of patterns of ties, core imperial authorities occupy a central position with respect to the overall network. In some respects, this is just another way of saying that empires have a core-periphery structure, but it has important implications.

In network analysis centrality is often a proxy for power and influence. The underlying mechanism involves informational asymmetries: actors with more connections have more information about the preferences and orientations of others than those with fewer connections.[63] In imperial structures, core authorities occupy a brokerage position between local intermediaries and aggregate peripheries: they negotiate relations between different peripheries, giving them a substantial advantage in terms of power and influence vis-à-vis actors in the rest of the network. The fact that these networks involve authoritative

[63] Freeman 1977, 35-36. Centrality involves the location of a node in a network, and does not imply anything about the relative centralization of an overall network.

relations of super- and subordination only reinforces those other structural sources of asymmetric power.

The second involves peripheral segmentation and collective mobilization. Figure 1 does not adequately capture one important consequence of heterogeneous contracting: the ties that run from IA through L1-L4 to local actors in each periphery all represent a different combination of rights, rules, and obligations. In other words, the categorical identity inhering in the relationship between IA and each periphery is different. This tends to prevent a concordance of interests between peripheries.

Moreover, the organization of empires involves structural holes between peripheries, i.e., the comparatively sparse and weak inter-periphery ties discussed above. Peripheries are disconnected or segmented from one another, at least with respect to authoritative or institutional ties. These structural holes work against cross-periphery coordination and collective mobilization; they create and reinforce low-cat, low-net inter-periphery relations. Since actors in each periphery are isolated from one another, peripheries will (all things being equal) tend

towards greater institutional, attitudinal, and normative differentiation over time.[64]

Local Structure

If we look at the local structure of imperial relations we see a rather different picture. In the relationship between core imperial authorities and any given periphery, local intermediaries display a higher degree of network centrality. L4, for example, is directly connected to IA, H, and I. I is directly connected to H and L4, H to I and L4, and IA only to L4. Thus, local intermediaries occupy the key brokerage position in the relationship between imperial cores and their peripheries. In terms of local relationships, they are *more powerful* than central authorities, although that power will, in some respects, be undermined by their lack of authority over imperial central authorities.

[64] Peripheries may themselves be segmented and categorically heterogeneous; they may even contain a variety of peripheries themselves. See, e.g., Daniels and Kennedy 2002.

Imperial Dynamics

The structure of transactions and the distribution of identities in empires helps account for the four major dynamics discussed previously: the workings of across-segment divide and rule, the dangers posed by cross pressures and how they shape legitimating strategies, the tradeoffs of intermediary autonomy, the use of within-segment divide and rule to prevent the formation of local coalitions against imperial control, and how these factors may concatenate into imperial overextension. We consider each of these in turn.

Aggregate Structure: Across-Segment Divide and Rule

A key difference between realist conceptions of international structure and those found in imperial relations is that the former stress the centrality of the balance-of-power mechanism while the latter involve recurrent logics of divide and rule. In balance-of-power theory, actors seek to form countervailing coalitions against rising powers. The stability of unipolarity, in turn, depends largely on the ability and willingness of states- or lack thereof- to challenge the dominant power. Divide-and-rule strategies, in contrast, aim to prevent the formation of countervailing coalitions by exploiting divisions between potential challengers. Divide and rule,

therefore, is a means of *maintaining hierarchy*, while the balance of power works to maintain anarchical relations. Similarly, divide-and-conquer strategies aim to *establish hierarchy* by disrupting the balance-of-power mechanism. Divide-and-conquer strategies follow broadly similar logics to those found in divide and rule.[65]

Why are processes of divide and rule central to the workings of empires? In empires, core imperial authorities control subordinated political communities; that control is institutionalized through asymmetric bargains. Thus, there is always a risk that actors within a periphery will find the imperial bargain unacceptable. At a minimum, they may seek to renegotiate the bargain on more favorable terms. At a maximum, they may seek to secede from the imperial arrangement. Even when the aim of peripheral actors is to renegotiate the terms of the bargain, they often seek to do so through a display of force. In any event, core imperial authorities need to be able to draw upon superior resources to those available to potential challengers in the periphery.

One way that empires do so is by acquiring and maintaining technological, military, and social-organizational advantages

[65] Hui 2004. On divide-and-rule strategies of control in general, see Baumgartner, Buckley et al. 1975.

over subordinated states. Another source of asymmetric power, though, is that core imperial authorities enjoy access to resources from throughout the empire, in other words, from the various peripheries connected to the core. Thus, in principle, they can meet resistance in one periphery with capabilities drawn from the rest of the imperial network.[66]

The network characteristics of empires play an important role in enhancing the position of imperial cores vis-à-vis peripheral segments. First, because heterogeneous contracting makes every imperial bargain unique, disputes between core imperial authorities and local actors over the terms of a bargain tend not to spill over into other peripheries.[67] Second, the existence of structural holes between peripheries creates, in essence, "firewalls" against the spread of resistance: the absence of cross-cutting ties and sources of collective identification across peripheries makes it very difficult for

[66] For similar arguments, although often focused on "displays of force" and foreign wars, see Cohen 2004; Luttwak 1976; Rosen 2003.

[67] However, it is also the case that actors may view bargains with other peripheries as signals about the core's broader imperial policies. These contravening tendencies are discussed further in the section on cross pressures.

actors in one periphery to collectively mobilize against imperial rule. In sum, resistance to imperial rule is less likely to spread and rebels are less likely to coordinate or collaborate. Core imperial authorities are therefore able to bring overwhelming force against an isolated rebellion or uncoordinated uprising.

We can observe these dynamics in numerous different cases. The Soviet Union put down the Hungarian uprising in 1956 without facing uprisings in other Warsaw Pact countries. In 1967 it intervened in Czechoslovakia to remove an intermediary whose liberalizing policies they perceived as destabilizing for the imperium, and did so with the help of other Warsaw Pact nations.[68] The existence of structural holes between peripheries helped contain rebellions in the Roman Empire, allowing the Romans to use concentrated force against uprisings.[69] Indeed, peripheral segmentation can even undermine simultaneous rebellions by discouraging cooperation. Between 1519 and 1522, Charles of Habsburg faced two rebellions in his Iberian domains. The revolt of the *Comuneros* in Castile (1520-1521) and of the *Hermanias* in Valencia (1519-1522), one of the constituent principalities of Aragon-Catalonia. Neither set of rebels made

[68] Nation 1992, 220-223 and 249-255.

[69] Luttwak 1976; Rosen 2003.

any attempt to communicate with one another or to coordinate their uprisings. They each saw their concerns as local matters, concerning customary rights, privileges, and factional disputes. Each, in turn, was defeated separately by forces loyal to Charles.[70]

Factors that Undermine Across-Periphery Divide and Rule

What kinds of developments undermine imperial divide and rule? The first involve decreasing peripheral segmentation. Increasing inter-periphery catness and netness expand the opportunities and potential motives for collective resistance to imperial rule. The second involve exogenous and endogenous triggers for simultaneous resistance, such as particular policies adopted by core imperial elites or exogenous shocks that lead to independent, but simultaneous, uprisings in multiple peripheries.

Decreasing peripheral segmentation. Empires often, either deliberately or inadvertently, encourage connections between peripheries. For example, imperial rule often facilitates the growth of inter-periphery trade, which brings with it increasing

[70] Haliczer 1981; Maravall 1983; Pérez 1970; Pérez 1989; te Brake 1998, 26-30, 26-30.

ties between actors in the periphery.[71] The diffusion of imperial culture can also build cross-cutting ties. The Romans and various Chinese dynasties created large zones of cultural commonality and interaction within their domains.[72] The Japanese engaged in varying degrees of "assimilative practices" within their empire, often aiming (with mixed success) to build emotional ties between colonial subjects and the symbols of the Japanese empire.[73] Such developments correlate with the diminished salience of divide and rule. As Motyl argues, "Because Britain's American colonies had developed extensive economic and political linkages long before 1776, they could mount organized opposition to His Majesty's imposition of various taxes and successfully rebel."[74]

The emergence of inter-periphery "transnational" movements also create cross-cutting ties across peripheries, as well as sometimes providing common categorical identities among actors in different peripheries. Prior to the Reformation coordinated cross-periphery resistance was a relatively rare event in early modern Europe. The pattern found in the *Coumeros* and *Hermanias*

[71] Ward-Perkins 2005, 87-104.

[72] Howe 2002, 41-43; Pagden 2001, 24-30.

[73] Peattie 1984, 189.

[74] Motyl 2001. See also Motyl 1999, 137.

rebellions was a typical feature of resistance in France, the Low Countries, and elsewhere.[75] The Reformation, however, led to the formation of relatively high-cat, high-net movements: it created transnational and trans-regional religions networks and identities that formed a basis for collective mobilization against – and sometimes, in support of – central authorities. The political crises of the Dutch Revolt and the French Wars of Religion were extremely destabilizing to their respective monarchies, in part, because members of the Reformed faith in both countries (as well as ultra-Catholics in France) drew strength and coordinated action across regions that were normally fragmented by different interests and identities.[76]

Such patterns need not involve dense ties between actors. The existence of common religious categorical identities across Empires is often a sufficient basis for simultaneous resistance.

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[75] The major exceptions usually involved secession struggles, which tended to activate existing cross-segment ties between aristocrats in high-stakes struggles over who would control the center. See Zagorin 1982. The agglomerative dynastic polities of early modern Europe had structures more akin to empires than modern nation-states. See Mackenney 1993.

[76] See, for example, Elliott 2000; Mackenney 1993; te Brake 1998. Koenigsberger 1955.

The British were very aware of this potential problem for their empire; they often shaped their policies towards the Ottoman Empire with an eye to how those policies would be received by their Muslim subjects. The Ottoman's themselves attempted, unsuccessfully, to encourage a jihad against the British in Egypt.[77]

Triggers of simultaneous resistance. These are a variety of exogenous and relatively autonomous developments that may undermine imperial divide and rule. Any shock, such as widespread famines or economic downturns, which provokes unrest in multiple segments might lead to across-segment resistance to imperial rule. Similarly, ideological forces and social movements can create simultaneous resistance to imperial rule in multiple segments even if they do not create cross-cutting ties or common identities. A good example of this kind of process is the role of the rise of nationalism in the unraveling of the European colonial empires. The diffusion of ideas of national self-determination to local elites and subjects led to multiple movements against colonial rule in the imperial territories of Britain, France, and the Netherlands. The rise of nationalist movements in so many different peripheries certainly undermined

[77] Karsh and Karsh 1999, 96, 117, 180.

the ability of the European colonial empires to maintain control over their extensive territories.[78]

Core imperial authorities may promulgate policies that lead to resistance in multiple peripheries at the same time. In some cases, a confluence of imperial attempts to extract more resources from different peripheries may trigger simultaneous rebellions. In other cases, core imperial authorities may attempt to impose uniform bargains across a number of peripheries. In such instances, they do away with the divide-and-rule advantages of heterogeneous bargaining. For example, towards the end of the Thirty Years' War, the Count-Duke Olivares' proposed a "Union of Arms" which would have abrogated traditional privileges in the constituent realms of the Spanish Habsburg monarchy by subjecting them to the more 'absolutist' form of rule found in Castile. The proposal prompted rebellions in both Portugal and Catalonia, and created the conditions for uprisings in Naples and Palermo; although the rebels did not actively collaborate, the Spanish Habsburgs could not effectively suppress all of the rebellions. Portugal achieved independence, and the uprisings titled the balance against the Habsburgs in their war with France and its allies.[79]

[78] Brunt 1965; Philpott 2001.

[79] Elliott 1984; te Brake 1998, 121-136, 121-136.

Aggregate Structure: Cross Pressures

Occupying a brokerage position at the center of a highly segmented network facilitates divide-and-rule strategies, but it also subjects actors to powerful cross pressures. As we have argued, the combination of heterogeneous contracting and peripheral segmentation reinforces, and sometimes creates, distinctive identities and interests. Thus, central imperial authorities are forced to navigate between different "pushes and pulls" as actors in peripheries attempt to shape imperial policy in favorable ways. In particular, when empires seek to expropriate revenue and manpower to fight conflicts in the interest of specific peripheries they may face stiff resistance from segments that have no stake in those conflicts.

For instance, most politically significant actors in the Low Countries saw little reason to contribute resources to the Spanish war effort when that effort involved security against the Turks in Germany and the Mediterranean.[80] The British experienced the dangers associated with cross pressures in the eighteenth century when they adopted policies designed to aid the East India Company. As H.V. Bowen notes, "Parliamentary action had been designed to enable the hard-pressed East India

[80] Israel 1995; Lynch 1991; Parker 1977.

Company to dispose of its large accumulated stocks of tea in London, but in the ports of Boston, New York, and Philadelphia the measure was interpreted as a calculated attempt to force cheap but highly taxed tea onto colonial consumers."[81] Negative propaganda against the East India Company generated a widespread perception that "Powerful Eastern influences emanating from one periphery of Britain's overseas empire were thus seen to have weakened the imperial core and it appeared that, in turn, they were now being brought to bear upon another periphery."[82]

Although heterogeneous contracting tends to isolate each imperial bargain, the last example demonstrates how poorly managed cross pressures can effectively link different peripheral bargains. When a core engages in strategies associated with "credible commitments" towards one periphery, it may convince actors in other peripheries that their interests are being "sold out."[83] This is most likely under conditions of mounting cross pressures, since actors in a given periphery

[81] Bowen 2002, 292.

[82] Bowen 2002, 295.

[83] Cf. Rector 2004. There is an extensive literature on the role of credible commitments in bargaining, see, for example, Fearon 1994; Fearon 1997; Fearon 1998; Smith 1996.

already tend to be concerned – as they were in British North America – about a core's favoritism towards another periphery.

Thus, the more segmented empires are, the easier across-segment divide and rule is, but the more intense cross pressures become. Central authorities may attempt to limit the impact of cross pressures through the judicious use of side payments or other incentives to actors within different segments. The problem with this approach is that it often accumulates obligations while draining imperial resources. Every time core imperial authorities renegotiate a core-periphery bargain on terms favorable to the periphery they reduce their access to revenue and resources.

Moreover, such strategies may, over time, worsen relations between imperial authorities and peripheral segments. As in the case of British North America, actors in a periphery may come to believe they are getting a comparatively poor deal with respect to other segments of the empire. Empires can also ignore demands coming from the periphery and bank on their ability to localize and suppress resistance, but doing so also increases the risks of resistance in an ever expanding number of peripheries.

Multivocal Signaling

One way of minimizing cross pressures is through legitimating strategies that are *multivocal* or *polyvalent*: that signal different identities and values to different audiences. The idea here is to get heterogeneous audiences to attribute shared identities and values to imperial authorities. Because agents invariably are more willing to accommodate, sacrifice for, and support those they see as members of an in-group, mutivocal legitimation strategies expand the "win-set" of imperial authorities in dealing with different peripheries and make resistance to their demands less likely.[84]

This is one of the crucial insights in John F. Padgett's and Christopher F. Ansell's seminal work on network structures and multivocal signaling. Cosimo de' Medici occupied a central location in the segmented network structure of elite interaction in Florence. The Medici family spanned the structural holes in Florentine elite interaction; Cosimo was able to exploit his resulting informational and resource advantages by engaging in "robust action," i.e., "multivocal action leads to Rorscach blot identities, with all alters constructing their own distinctive

[84] On how collective identification impacts the willingness of actors to settle for less favorable resource distribution, see Mercer 1995; Tajfel 1978.

attribution of the identity of ego." Multivocal signaling is most effective when the two audiences either cannot or do not communicate with one another. If they do compare notes, they may demand clarification from the signaler.[85]

In the context of imperial dynamics, mutlivocality enables central authorities to engage in divide-and-conquer tactics without permanently alienating other political sites and thus eroding the continued viability of such strategies. To the "extent that local social relations and the demands of standardizing authorities contradict each other, polyvalent [or multivocal] performance becomes a valuable means of mediating between them" since actions can be "coded differently within the audiences."[86] On the other hand, during moments of political resistance, opponents of central authorities also have to hold together diverse coalitions if they wish to counteract divide-and-conquer strategies. Multivocal signaling provides a crucial means of preventing the splintering of any cobbled-together political coalition.

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[85] Padgett and Ansell 1993, 1263. It should be clear that our ideal-typical understanding of empires shares crucial structural similarities with Padgett's and Ansell's description of renaissance Florence.

[86] Tilly 2002, 153-154.

These dynamics provide additional reasons why Reformation led to a breakdown in the European political order. We have discussed how the Reformation created transnational networks that bridged the segmented structure of early modern states. It also, however, made it difficult for dynasts to engage in multivocal signaling. One could not easily be both a Protestant and a Catholic, an advocate of reformation or counter-reformation, at the same time.[87]

Legitimacy, as we have already suggested, plays an important role in imperial management. As a form of hierarchical organization, empires need to convince significant actors that the benefits of continued imperial rule outweigh the costs of domination. To the extent that they can legitimate that domination, they make resistance less likely and thereby secure continued imperial control. It follows from our discussion of cross pressures, however, that not all strategies of imperial legitimation are equal. Multivocal signaling, in particular, can help offset the dangers associated with cross pressures and therefore minimize the tradeoffs created by peripheral segmentation.

[87] Author.

Local Structure: Intermediary Autonomy

Indirect rule minimizes the governance costs of rule.[88] Empire "has proved to be a recurrent, flexible form of large-scale rule for two closely related reasons: because it holds together disparate smaller-scale units without requiring much centrally-controlled internal transformation, and because it pumps resources to rulers without costly monitoring and repression."[89] As long as intermediaries are left to tailor rule-making and enforcement to local conditions, core imperial authorities can avoid the various costs that come with direct entanglement in peripheral governance.

In fact, the imposition of direct rule can be particularly 'costly' when it turns central authorities into intimate participants in local factional and political struggles, thereby eroding their ability to function—in pretense if not in fact—as 'impartial' brokers in such conflicts. On the other hand, when intermediaries assume the costs of participating in local factional politics central authorities are able to maintain some degree of plausible deniability. If intermediaries make and enforce unpopular or politically disruptive policies – even when those policies are approved by central authorities – central

[88] On hierarchy and governance costs, see Lake 2001.

[89] Tilly 2003, 4.

authorities can triangulate between intermediaries and their subjects.

Niccòlo Machiavelli describes a rather extreme version of this kind of triangulation strategy. After conquering the Romagna, Cesare Borge put Remiro d'Orco in charge of restructuring the province and bringing order to it. But, since "he knew the harsh measures of the past had given rise to some enmity towards him," the duke decided to make clear that d'Orco, not he, was responsible. Thus, "one morning, in the town square of Cesena," Cesare Borge, "had Remiro d'Orco's corpse laid out in two pieces, with a chopping board and a bloody knife beside it.[90]

The manipulation of intermediary autonomy to create plausible deniability is often far less dramatic. The Spanish routinely let governors and viceroys take the blame for unpopular policies, but usually merely sacked their intermediaries when imperial demands triggered too much resistance.[91]

There are two main downsides to indirect rule. First, it can be rather inefficient. The more indirect imperial administration, the more room for licit and illicit diversion of

[90] Machiavelli 1994, 24-25.

[91] Koenigsberger and Mosse 1968.

resources into the hands of intermediaries. Indirect rule also decreases the efficiency of response to imperial directives; as in all principal-agent relations, the less imperial authorities monitor and enforce compliance with policies, the more room they create for subversion of those policies.[92]

Second, because intermediaries occupy a position of relative centrality vis-à-vis the core and a particular periphery, they may gain asymmetric leverage over the relations between core imperial authorities and imperial subjects. If they use this leverage to pursue their own interests in power and wealth, they may not merely subvert particular policies but decide to break away from imperial control. Such cases were endemic during periods of the Roman Empire (unified, western, and eastern); indeed, military leaders, governors, and local rulers did not only set themselves up as autonomous local rulers, but often sought to claim the imperial title for themselves.[93]

The archetypal case of such “patrimonial secessions” is, perhaps, Muhammad Ali Pasha’s uprising against the Ottoman Empire. Appointed governor of Egypt in 1805, he immediately consolidated his personal power by massacring the extant Mamluk

[92] Pratt and Zeckhauser 1991; Tilly 2003, 4.

[93] Isaac 1992; Ostrogorski 1969.

elite. From there he set about to substitute his own empire for that of the Ottomans. Ultimately, only foreign intervention prevented his dismemberment of much of the Ottoman Empire.[94]

Empires can deal with these tradeoffs in a variety of ways. Various Chinese dynasties, for example, rotated imperial administrators to prevent them from developing strong (and independent) ties with actors in a particular segment.[95] However, any attempt to manage these tradeoffs involves finding an acceptable compromise between them. There is no "magic bullet" for navigating the costs and benefits of intermediary autonomy.

Local Structure: Within-Segment Divide and Rule

Imperial strategies to maintain effective rule within segments aim to prevent the formation of extensive coalitions against their revenue, resource, and political demands. In keeping with our simplified model of imperial actors, within-segment divide and rule involves four classes of actors: central authorities, local intermediaries, and two groups of local actors. All things being equal, the fewer the number of significant sites (actors and groups of actors) that resist

[94] Karsh and Karsh 1999, 27-41.

[95] Tilly 2003, 4.

imperial rule at any given time, the easier it is for empires to maintain control over a periphery.

Within-segment divide and rule takes a number of different forms. In *binding strategies*, empires develop a class of local actors – often local elites who themselves may act as intermediaries – whose status, material position, or ideological orientations tie them closely to central authorities. This is the strategy Charles V ultimately opted for in Castile when he threw his support and patronage behind the great nobles in order to crush the *Comuneros* revolt. Imperial authorities have pursued these binding strategies in a number of ways: by making hostages of the children of local elites (with the aim of both control those elites and socializing their successors into the customs and mores of the empire), by providing various forms of side payments to a particular local group, and otherwise making segments of the local population dependent upon imperial rule.[96] Regardless, the aim is to create relatively strong and dense ties with some subset of significant local actors. These actors, whether they act as local intermediaries or as adjutants to imperial rule, are thus (the imperial authorities hope) removed as a potential site of resistance.

[96] For examples, see Allsen 1987, 72-4. and Barrett 1995, 586-8.

In *pivoting strategies*, central authorities maintain the ability to triangulate between different local factions, and even their own intermediaries. Pivoting is more difficult to implement, but potentially more effective because it prevents imperial rule from itself becoming dependent on the goodwill of a single local group. This kind of "playing off" of local groups against one another is chronicled, for instance, by Hendrik Spruyt in his account of the early consolidation of the Capetian monarchy in France.[97] Although not precisely parallel in nature, this is the kind of policy the Jurchen used to prevent the emergence of a threat to their rule from the Mongolian steppe. The strategy worked well until the Jurchen's miscalculations facilitated the rise of Chinggis Khan.[98] The British, for their part, made extensive use of such within-segment divide-and-rule strategies.[99]

Because of the absence of institutional firewalls generated by an empire's rimless hub-and-spoke structure, within-segment divide and rule is inherently more difficult than across-segment divide and rule. Thus within-segment divide and rule depends upon exploiting categorical differences: class, status,

[97] Spruyt 1994.

[98] Barfield 1989, 177-184.

[99] Pollis 1973.

identity, religion, ethnicity, and so forth.[100] For example, Mahmood Mamdami argues that indirect rule in British Africa permanently reconstructed social relations by empowering and disempowering different local actors.[101] The Belgians relied on the Tutsi minority to maintain control over Rwanda-Burundi.[102] This is one major reason why binding strategies are easier to implement than pivoting strategies: it is less difficult to rely on a particular group to enforce imperial commands than to repeatedly shift commitments between categorically distinctive groups without, in turn, undermining the credibility of imperial bargains.

The drawbacks of binding strategies are equally straightforward. By turning one class of local actors into, in effect, local intermediaries, binding can increase their bargaining power vis-à-vis the empire. In other words, it can reciprocally enhance the dependency of core imperial authorities upon local elites. Imperial authorities, therefore, lose some of the flexibility and autonomy associated with pivoting

[100] On manipulating or generating categorical stratification as an aspect of divide and rule, see Baumgartner, Buckley et al. 1975, 422.

[101] Mamdani 1996.

[102] Des Forges 1999; Melvern 2000.

strategies. In general, this tends to increase aggregate-level cross pressures, since imperial authorities cannot respond to the claims of one class of local elites by credibly threatening to switch their support to another set of local actors. The Habsburgs' dependency upon Castilian notables after the *Comuneros* revolt, for example, led them to focus their extractive policies on the middle classes – a focus that ultimately destroyed Castile's economy.[103] Finally, although binding strategies tend to produce a loyal subgroup of subjects, they also risk creating a class of permanently disenchanted local have-nots.

Empires often combine aspects of these strategies: they attempting to make elites and non-elites socially, politically, and culturally tied to the center while manipulating fault lines between local populations. Although this represents an extremely effective means of maintaining control over a segment, it can be very difficult to implement because of the tradeoffs discussed above.

Rethinking Overextension

International-relations scholars tend to treat imperial overextension as a consequence of balance-of-power dynamics or

[103] Lynch 1981.

of a variety of “myths” generated by core domestic political calculations.[104] This tendency can also be found in literature on the risks of American overextension.[105] But implicit in much of this work is the recognition that overextension stems from the accumulation of peripheral interests by imperial cores and/or failures of imperial management within peripheries.

As Paul MacDonald argues, imperial expansion is often “more the result of pressures in the periphery that lead to unintended, unanticipated political developments that generate reactions that pull great powers more deeply into the politics of other polities.”[106] For example, this was one of the dilemmas the British faced throughout the eighteenth century vis-à-vis the North American colonies: the interests of their colonists pulled them into struggles on the North American continent that, from a strategic perspective, were genuinely peripheral. When the British government demanded, after the Seven Years War, that their colonist pay part of the costs of these struggles, they set in motion events leading to the American Revolution.[107]

[104] Kupchan 1996; Snyder 1991.

[105] E.g., Bellah 2002; Chace 2003; Snyder 2003.

[106] MacDonald 2004.

[107] Lenman 2001.

Overextension is also often a consequence of local failures of imperial management, rather than simply a result of "foreign policy" dynamics. For instance, the Spanish Habsburgs' wars with England (which scholars often cite as a key factor in Spanish overextension) were a byproduct of a peripheral uprising in the Netherlands. Both Philip II and Philip III hoped that, by either conquering England or forcing it to capitulate to Spanish hegemonic control, they could cut off England's strategic support for the Dutch.[108]

However peripheral entanglements, failures of local imperial management, and external warfare combine, all are often present in the process of imperial overextension and decline. In this respect, predominant international-relations accounts of overextension are incomplete rather than incorrect; the problem is when they divert our attention from dynamics driven by the internal structure of empires.

Consequences of Variation Between the Ideal Types

The systems we have discussed are ideal-typical. Real international systems involve particular configurations of

[108] Allsen 1991; Kamen 2003.

aspects of these ideal types; even in extreme cases, a particular international system will only approximate unipolarity, hegemony, or empire. Representing these ideal types in network-structural terms grants additional analytical leverage to scholars. We can explore variation in particular transactional patterns to see how they reflect different aspects of the various ideal types. By using the various ideal types as benchmarks we can generate insights into what dynamics, or mix of dynamics, will predominate in any particular set of interstate interactions.

One of the key differences between imperial, hegemonic, and unipolar orders is the strength and density of dominance ties between preeminent polities and subordinate polities, i.e., the degree of autonomy enjoyed by actors occupying a leadership position in the latter (see Figure 5). This generates a continuum of "zones," ranging from full autonomy (unipolarity), to no autonomy (an ideal-typical nation-state). Hegemonic and imperial orders fall in between, with "informal empire" constituting an ambiguous area between hegemonies and empires.

<< Figure 5 about here>>

This helps clarify the debate over hegemony and empire. Niall Ferguson argues that "the very concept of 'hegemony' is

really just a way to avoid talking about empire, 'empire' being a word to which most Americans remain averse."[109] We have already seen that, in ideal-typical terms, empires and hegemonies are different structural forms, but that non-constitutional hegemonic orders and empires share many network-structural characteristics.

Using this kind of analysis, and assuming the truth of claims about unipolar and hegemonic systems, we should expect a number of changes as transactional patterns move between those described in each of the ideal types.

First, as the strength and density of ties between preeminent powers and local rulers decreases we should see three changes: (a) divide-and-rule dynamics will become less significant vis-à-vis balance-of-power processes, (b) principal-agent problems will increase, and (c) within-segment divide-and-rule will become less important for the stability of the order. The more autonomous local rulers are within this range, the more they are able to conduct independent foreign policies and thus engage in balancing behavior. Classic hegemonic orders, for example, should display a mixture of across-segment divide-and-

[109] Ferguson and Mansbach 1996, 160.

rule and balance-of-power dynamics.[110] Indeed, hegemonic orders can be thought of as either extremely weak empires or unipolar systems with some imperial properties (consider their location on the continuum in Figure 5). Regardless, decreasing network strength and density between preeminent powers and local rulers will diminish the ability of the former to ensure that their policy directives are followed by the latter; it will also make the relationship more "inter-state" and less "inter-societal."

Second, both increasing network connectivity and categorical homogeneity between lesser powers diminishes the efficacy of preeminent power divide-and-rule strategies. We have already outlined this logic in the section on across-segment divide and rule, but it has interesting implications. For one, constitutional orders create cross-cutting ties between lesser powers, and therefore the more a system incorporates "constitutional" elements the less a preeminent power will be able to implement divide-and-rule strategies. For another, various aspects of globalization – particularly the growth of

[110] The kind of strategies described by advocates of "offshore balancing" combine the two logics., in that a hegemon seeks to keep a region divided in order to prevent the emergence of challengers to its global interests and position. See Layne 1997.

economic interdependence and transnational movements – should make across-segment divide-and-rule more difficult.

Third, the intensity of cross pressures and the importance of multivocal signaling should diminish as either (a) network connectivity and categorical homogeneity between lesser powers increases or (b) as ties between the preeminent power and lesser powers decrease. In ideal-typical unipolar systems, there are no significant ties between any of the actors. The preeminent power does not occupy a brokerage position, *ergo*, it will not experience intense cross pressures and multivocal legitimation will not be a significant strategy of control. On the other hand, constitutional orders involve reciprocal authority ties between all relevant units; thus, the preeminent power's structural position is less one of a brokerage and more one of joint participation in generalized decision making. These conditions not only minimize cross pressures but tend to displace them across the network.

Fourth, as contracting becomes more uniform, the intensity of cross pressures and the importance of multivocal signaling will decrease. This is the inverse of the logic put forth in the discussion of heterogeneous contracting. It suggests another way in which constitutional orders are less subject to imperial dynamics, and thus another source of salient structural variation in international politics. Indeed, when great powers

opt for multiple bilateral ties over multilateral arrangements, they capture some of the costs and benefits associated with imperial rule. There is evidence that policy makers, at least implicitly, recognize these tradeoffs. Recent research suggests that the US opted for a hub-and-spoke alliance system, rather than a North Atlantic Treaty Organization-style multilateral system, in East Asia, at least in part, in order to facilitate divide-and-rule strategies, i.e., to avoid collusion between "local intermediaries" such as Chiang Kai-shek of Formosa and Syngman Rhee of South Korea.[111]

These claims are, of course, derived from ideal-typical analysis. Substantiating them requires further investigation into specific cases. Any given system may involve a variety of transactional patterns reflecting various aspects of these ideal types. A particular preeminent power may itself have relations that, vis-à-vis different states or in even in some policy arenas, reflect different network configurations. What our analysis of ideal-typical empires, and our discussion of variation between different kinds of systems with preeminent powers suggests, is that analysts should not presuppose that a system fits one particular type and then use that type to derive

[111] Cha 2004.

lessons for grand strategy. Instead, we should inquire more deeply into how variation in the structure of relations leads to different embedded dynamics in international politics, with more complicated consequences for the development and implementation of grand strategy.

Conclusions

Is the United States an empire? This paper does not seek to answer that question, but to suggest that we should be asking a different one: to what extent, and with whom, does the structure of relations between the United States and other political communities resemble those found in ideal-typical empires? The American relationship with Iraq undoubtedly has many of the structural characteristics we associate with empires,[112] but the picture is far more mixed when we consider other Middle Eastern states, such as Egypt and Israel, let alone European and East Asian polities.[113] Rather than engage in detailed empirical assessments of American foreign relations here, we close by

[112] Diamond 2005.

[113] Katzenstein and Okarawa 2001/2002; Risse-Kappen 1995.

suggesting a number of implications that follow from our analysis.

To the extent that American international relations have an imperial structure, current debates about the existence or non-existence of balancing represent a misdirected focus. In imperial systems, the problem is *not* counterbalancing, but instead the effectiveness of imperial strategies of divide and rule; if we observe widespread counterbalancing, then an informal imperial system is already passing away. Similarly, the problem of "anti-Americanism" takes on new dimensions. Since the stability of empires depends, in no small measure, on the continuing legitimacy of imperial bargains, growing hostility towards imperial cores represents a demonstrable threat to imperial order. It may also be the case that some of the problems in American-Middle East relations are tired to cross pressures: consider the difficulties created by close American ties to Israel for its relations with Arab publics in Egypt, Jordan, and elsewhere.[114]

If there are embedded imperial relations in the current international system, it also follows that our traditional concern with inter-state relations is likely to distract us from many of the dynamics most important to the stability of the

[114] Katzenstein and Keohane 2005, 14.

current order, i.e., what we have called the "within segment" and "across segment" processes involving local intermediaries and local actors.[115] Our analysis suggests, for example, that transnational movements – whether in the form of militant Islam or more peaceful forms of transnational activism – should become relevant to the kinds of power-political concerns traditionally addressed in realist theory.

Finally, any "American empire" faces a basic problem. Current processes of globalization, such as enhanced inter-societal communications and other channels of interdependence, are both a source of stability and instability for the putative "American imperial order." On the one hand, they represent part of the "bargain" the United States has offered to other political communities in exchange for the toleration of American primacy. On the other hand, by enhancing inter-segment connectivity they undermine imperial rule. It is potentially ironic, therefore, that just as attention to the possibility of American empire is reaching new heights, the basic conditions of possibility for American empire may themselves be eroding.

[115] The most obvious examples involve current American dilemmas in Iraq and Afghanistan, but consider also relations with other "client" and allied states, such as Pakistan. See, e.g., Lieven 2002.

Figures

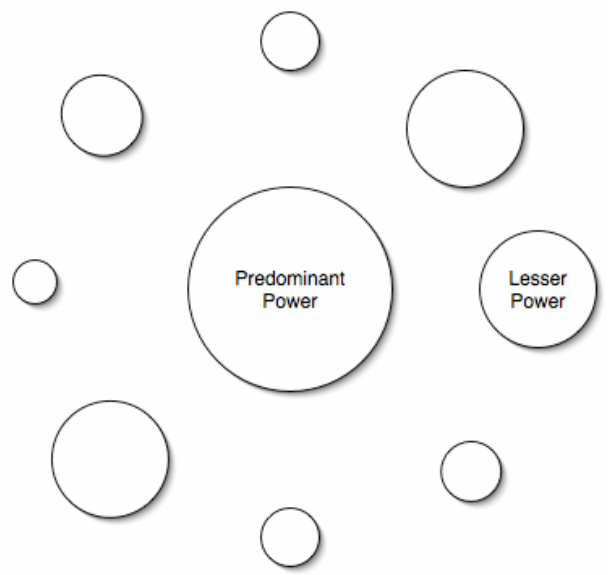

Figure 1: Unipolarity

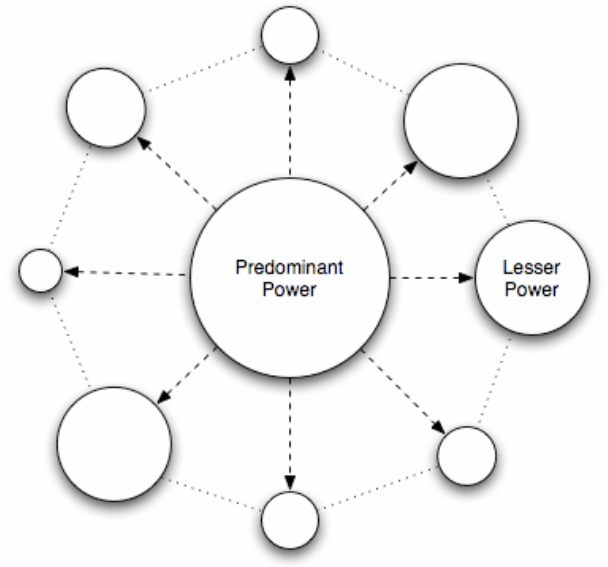

Figure 2: Hegemony

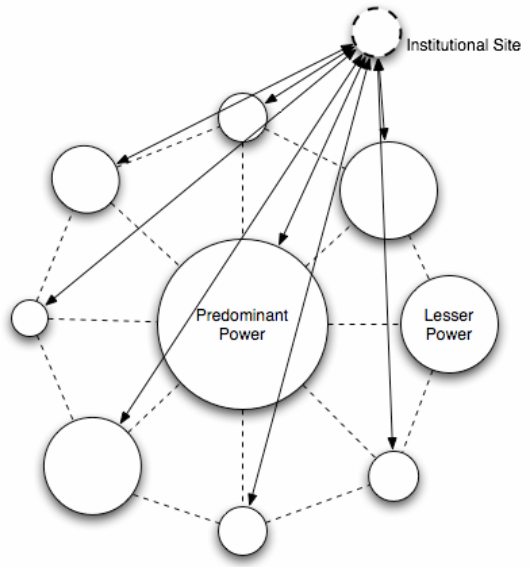

Figure 3: Constitutional Order

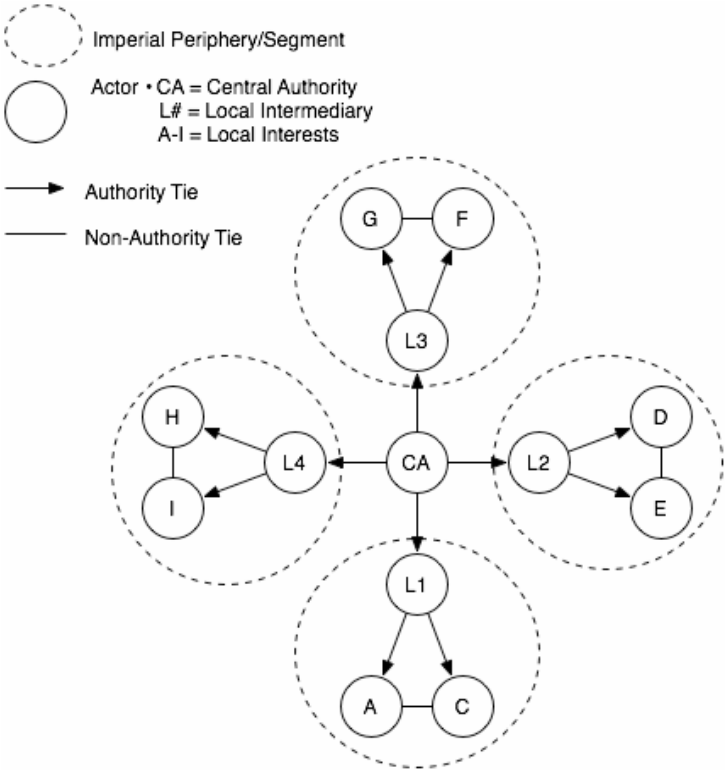

Figure 4: Empire

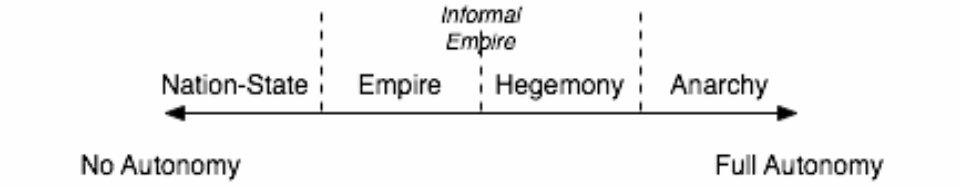

Figure 5: Intermediary Autonomy and International Orders

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